

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS (Genital Warts)

What are Genital Warts?

Genital warts are caused by a virus called **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)**, which is very similar to the virus that causes warts on other parts of the body. Many individuals are unaware that they have HPV infection because certain types of HPV cause no visible signs or symptoms.

Who gets Genital Warts?

Infection can occur in sexually active men and women of all ages, races, and social classes, and can affect both homosexuals and heterosexuals. Infants may acquire this infection from their mother during delivery.

What are the symptoms?

Genital warts begin as small lumps often with an irregular cauliflower-like surface. The shape and color vary depending on their location. In **women**, the vulva and the perineum (area between vaginal opening and anus) are most frequently affected, but warts also occur in the vagina, cervix (inside the vagina), anus and rectum. In **men**, the glans, foreskin, thigh, and urethral opening are most commonly affected, followed by the shaft of the penis, scrotum, anus and rectum. Men sometimes have small shiny spots called "pearly papules" on the glans which are normal and should not be confused with warts.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The first symptoms usually appear within 2 to 3 months after infection, but may occur anywhere between 1-20 months.

How is Genital Human Papilloma Virus spread?

Direct skin-to-skin contact spreads the infection most easily. However, the virus is not transmitted via blood or body fluids. The most common means of transmission for genital HPV is direct contact between infected skin on the penis, scrotum, vagina, vulva, or anus and uninfected skin in the same areas of the partner's body. The virus targets the moist, usually pink or red tissue known as the mucous membranes, and the areas surrounding the genitals.

How are Genital Warts diagnosed?

Genital warts are diagnosed by their typical appearance. They may be raised or flat, single or multiple, small or large, or even cauliflower-like. One of the most widely used tools to diagnose genital warts in women is colposcopy, which uses a magnifying scope to look at the interior of the vagina. Colposcopy also enables the

physician to see the skin much more closely.

What is the treatment for Genital Warts?

Treatment for external warts is podophyllin or Imiquimod cream. Alternative treatment includes: cryotherapy (freezing) with liquid nitrogen, burning with electrocautery or laser surgery. If many warts are present, surgery may be necessary using local anesthetic. Imiquimod, podophyllin, and Podofilox should not be used during pregnancy.

How can I avoid getting HPV or Genital Warts?

You can reduce your risk of getting HPV or Genital Warts by not having sex with anyone or by having sex only with one uninfected partner who has sex only with you. People who have many sexual partners are at higher risk of getting any of the sexually transmitted diseases including HPV. Latex condoms are recommended if you have sex with more than one partner, or if your partner has sex with someone else besides you.

What about HPV, Genital Warts, and Cancer?

The types of HPV linked to cervical cancer are not the types that usually cause genital warts. However a woman with genital warts, like any other sexually active woman, should get yearly Pap smears. The types of HPV that cause clinically inapparent or subclinical infection continue to be studied as possible risk factors for cervical cancer.

What about HPV, Genital Warts, and pregnancy?

It is important that a pregnant woman notify her doctor or clinic if she or her partner(s) has had genital warts. Because of hormonal changes during pregnancy, warts can bleed or grow in size and number, and may make delivery more difficult. A pregnant woman with genital warts blocking the birth canal will need to deliver her baby by cesarean-section.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor.
- Your local health department listed in your telephone directory.
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191.

**UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF EPIDEMIOLOGY**

August 2001